



Medium Of Instruction In Higher Education: Language Barriers And Their Impact On Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

The medium of instruction is crucial in determining the overall learning outcomes and academic experiences of students in higher education. This study examines the effects of language barriers on children's learning outcome in multilingual classrooms where the primary language of teaching is a non-native language, particularly English. It describes how poor language proficiency might make it more difficult for students to comprehend lectures, participate in class discussions, think critically, and achieve well academically. It is based on previous research and studies. The study emphasizes how a lack of competency in the teaching language makes it difficult for many students to understand complicated subject matter, which can result in low confidence, decreased engagement, and unequal learning chances.

Keywords: Language, Learning outcome, Medium of instruction, Higher education, Multilingual classroom

Introduction

Medium of instruction is very important in the process of teaching and learning. There are language barriers in the classroom for students as well as for teachers. If students speak other language than the language they are being taught, then they face problems in their academic journey. Language barrier can affect their learning outcomes.

Languages and the medium of teaching are among the many facets of education that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to address. In general, a flexible and multilingual approach to learning is emphasized under NEP 2020. It acknowledges the value of using the mother tongue or regional language as the primary language of instruction during the formative years of schooling. According to the guideline, pupils should learn Hindi, English, and their mother tongue or regional language. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brought about a number of changes to higher education. The goal of these changes is to make the higher education system more adaptable, interdisciplinary, and in line with international norms (Khandelwal et al., 2025).

English has become the main language of instruction in many countries' higher education institutions in the setting of global academic and professional environments (Jegade, 2026).

The medium of instruction has a significant effect on how good students' do academically. Language is an essential component of cognition that should not be ignored; it is more than just a way to deliver

information. According to researches, Students who are taught in their native language receive higher grades than those who are taught in other language (Ullah et al., 2024). The medium of instruction has emerged as a major issue of concern. In an effort to improve graduates' academic flexibility, and global competitiveness, English-medium instruction has expanded drastically everywhere (Lin & Lei, 2021). Language barriers in higher education affect the ability of students to understand difficult academic subject matter and not just communication related issues. According to research, students' cognitive stress increases as they study a second language since they have to process both language and content at the same time (Ramjan et al., 2024).

Review of Literature

Lin & Lei (2021) conducted a study to examine whether students who take a business course in English at a Chinese university perform differently from those who take the same course in Chinese. Additionally, it examines how students' academic success (as determined by GPA) and English proficiency impact their academic achievement in English medium classrooms. This study adopted a quasi-experimental design. There was no significant difference between the English-taught and Chinese taught classes in terms of the students' academic results. The study also found that students' performance in English-medium classrooms is influenced by both their general academic ability and their English language proficiency.

Farid, Parveen & Iqbal (2023) conducted a study on students to know the impact of teaching in English on learning at the university level. Two hundred students with a range of academic backgrounds and linguistic skills completed surveys to share their opinions about English medium instruction. The results provide a complex picture of how students view English as the language of instruction in their academic work. Students' opinions toward English medium instruction were both favourable and unfavourable. Language understanding, communication, an identity issues were identified as important issues. It was discovered that a number of factors, including as the quality of instruction, the degree of language support given, and the students' own language proficiency, had an impact on how English medium instruction affected their learning outcomes.

Alanazi & Curle (2024) conducted a study to look into the difficulties that medical students encounter while studying medicine through English medium instruction in Saudi Arabia. In this study, a mix-method research approach was adopted. The results of this study showed that when studying medicine through English medium instruction, students faced many difficulties, including reading medical materials, comprehending lectures that were only given in English, making presentations, and speaking clearly. These difficulties became less noticeable as students advanced in their courses, although they were more noticeable in their first or second years of college.

Ramjan et al. (2024) conducted a study which improves our understanding of how foreign university students acquire a new language when they study in country where the language of instruction differs from their native language, such as Taiwan and Australia. A convergent parallel mixed-method design was employed in this study. The study found that language use varies depending on the situation and context also students make better use of their reading and listening skills, but they struggle with writing and require more assistance to develop their language acquisition.

Kaur (2025) conducted a study on B.Ed. students' academic performance and teaching aptitude in relation to the teaching medium. This study examines how the medium of instruction affects B.Ed. students' academic performance and teaching ability. The results showed that the students' medium of instruction had a statistically significant impact on both academic achievement and teaching ability.

Kaoje & Yusuf (2025) conducted a study to examine the effect of English as a teaching language on Nigerian students' comprehension and involvement in science. The results of this study support to the belief that teaching science subjects in English have a negative effect on students' understanding and involvement in the classroom, especially for students whose first language is not English. The findings emphasize the importance of language in influencing academic results and the importance of taking students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds into account while creating science courses in Nigeria.

Jegede (2026) conducted a study on English medium of instruction and its effect on higher education outcomes in Nigeria. The purpose of this study was to look into how English instruction affects students' academic performance in Nigerian universities. The study found that academic success is positively

correlated with language proficiency. However, many pupils struggled with language, teachers and students had differing opinions about English medium instruction.

Berthilde & Phaniel (2026) conducted a study to investigate the relation between language barriers and academic achievement in Rwandan higher education institutions. This study used a quantitative research approach with a descriptive-correlational design. The results showed a strong negative correlation between students' academic performance and language barriers, suggesting that poor English proficiency affects understanding engagement, and general performance.

Objectives

- 1) To examine the role of medium of instruction in higher education institutions.
- 2) To analyse the impact of language difficulties on students' academic performance and learning outcomes.

Research Methodology

A systematic review approach is used in this study followed by the principles of evidence-based educational research. The review paper gave findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and reports.

Discussion and Findings

According to the reviewed literature, students' learning results in higher education have a significant impact of the medium of instruction. Although teaching in English opens door to the world, it also puts obstacles in the way of students who don't understand English fully.

One important finding from the literature is that language obstacles impact academic engagement, motivation, and cognitive processes in addition to being linguistic problems. Deep learning and critical thinking can be affected by the increased cognitive load that non-native language learners frequently face. Therefore, enhancing equal educational opportunity requires the adoption of inclusive and flexible language policy. According to a National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) assessment, pupils are 20–30% more likely to drop out of school if they are not taught in their mother tongue (Kumar, 2025). Nyirandimukaya and Manizabayo (2026) found that language barriers and students' academic performance are negatively correlated in higher learning institutions. Kaoje and Yusuf (2025) also found that English have a negative effect on students' understanding and involvement in the classroom.

Recommendations

- To increase students' understanding and engagement in the classroom, higher education institutions should implement bilingual and multilingual teaching strategies.
- The use of mother tongue and regional languages in addition to English in technical and professional education should be promoted by higher education policies.
- Bridge courses and remedial language programs should be offered by academic institutions to individuals with non-English educational backgrounds.
- Language-related learning obstacles could be lessened by integrating AI-based translation tools with digital learning systems.
- When giving lectures and participating in academic discussions, faculty members should speak in an understandable, simple manner.
- The National Education Policy 2020 recommends multilingual provisions, which educational policymakers should make sure are implemented effectively.
- Teachers should receive professional training in multilingual pedagogy and inclusive classroom communication.

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